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Dreams, in being so open to interpretation, can easily drive a person to insanity. Considering the extremely open matter and lack of any initial grounding in fact, one can easily be overwhelmed by the intimidating scope of the subject. A certain restraint naturally presents itself when considering the abstract nature of dreams and their inherent meaning. As I have grown a sense of inquiry in my life, I felt the need to contemplate such nonsense and regard it as fact.

When I was young, I had a dream that stuck with me through the years, but had no coherent meaning. I remember minute details as vividly as I remember actual memories of my childhood. As mentioned in the motion picture *Inception*, a constant fear to hold as a dream interpreter is that, by delving too deeply into the dream world, one forgets which memories are real and which are created from dreams. In this confusing state, one can hold onto a dream as if it were real, as if the dream world was as legitimate as the actual one. Although distorted and amplified for dramatic effect, the concept behind the film is very possible. At hysterical levels of fascination, I desperately wanted to learn exactly how dreams can be so real and yet, in reality, resemble nothing more than the ramblings of a restless subconscious. It's at this point that I questioned the belief that was ingrained in my head, which declared that dreams only resemble these pointless ramblings. On multiple occasions, I have woken from a particularly powerful dream, with its deliberate message weighing down on me for weeks. I cannot accept that dreams are random or even unnecessary. As I ponder my old dreams and their effects on me, I believe that dreams act as an important process of the subconscious and should not be

disregarded.

Recently, I revisited an old dream as well as the powerful emotions I felt toward it at the time. Through this moment of unbiased questioning, I began to form a revealing interpretation of a once nonsensical story. James Sully, an abstract psychologist, claims that dreams resemble a "letter in cipher," in that "the dream-inscription, when scrutinized closely, loses its first look of balderdash and takes on the aspect of a serious, intelligible message." A fundamental theory among psychologists originally proposed by Sigmund Freud suggests that all dreams can be reduced to a basic wish fulfilled in a fantasy because reality proved disappointing. In the fashion of Freud, I will analyze and interpret the following dream in detail until it is only a wish to be fulfilled.

In the beginning of the dream, I found myself floating in the middle of the ocean. My first decision was to start swimming in a random direction until I found something to aim towards. Once I started swimming and occasionally dipping my head underwater out of necessity, I recognized the silhouettes of giant creatures swimming far below. The blurred murky shadow of their massive bodies drifted by as if in another world, completely ignorant of my existence. At this discovery, I picked up my pace, knowing I was swimming towards nothing. I recall the serene view as rays of the sun gleaming against the horizon sent a reflective streak of light across the water.

The story basically faded into the next moment, where I walked across the shoreline of a very small island. A small group of people stood, huddled around a single speaker, on the other side of the island. Turning to address several individuals of the group, the speaker leaned towards them as if revealing a dark secret. Very abruptly, the speaker froze in place and the huddled group turns my way. The group didn't seem violent or hostile, but I felt immediately threatened by the tension of the moment. For a considerably long amount of time, the group and I remained in this frozen moment of tension. A powerful sense of self-doubt overcame me as I

worried that I would not fit into this preconceived group of presumably stranded people. Looking beyond the group, I noticed that a distant wave was rippling on the edge of the ocean. The next moment seemed to drag on at a slower speed as I simply watched the wave slowly increase in size.

The group remained frozen as I turned away and ran into the water directly opposing the wave. A cold, sharp stinging sensation encased my whole body as I dove into the water, forcing me to frantically find the surface. Upon resurfacing, I noticed that the sky resembled a gray rolling marble in the clouds' panicked movements. Brittle and shaking, I turned back towards the island and discovered that the wave was only seconds away, so large that its shadow enveloped the entire island. The group still held its huddled formation as the speaker addressed the same people, but now the conversation seemed less instructional and more like a final resolution before parting ways. From the shallow depths of the shoreline, I held my breath until my body shook in a stuttering pattern and the dream world disintegrated.

For years, I had discarded this dream as a random story that didn't deserve to be analyzed to any extent. Once I started contemplating the bold ideas of psychologists and the methods of Freud, I realized that a crucial step to understanding dreams is to analyze my own. To prove Sully's theory that all dreams have an intelligible message underneath the chaotic surface, I chose to analyze the most chaotic and random dream that I can remember. Before I attempt an analysis of a dream that has puzzled me for years, I shall review all of the groundwork laid by professionals and gain an understanding of the fundamental process of dreaming.

To understand the abstract beliefs behind dreaming, one must understand the physical process behind it. The broad concept of living, in order to assuage the intimidating size of the matter, can be divided into wakefulness, NREM sleep, and REM sleep. REM stands for rapid

eye movement, and proceeds NREM, which is non-rapid eye movement. In REM sleep, the eyes move rapidly while the brain remains active. This combination results in a mental process of dream building while the eyes create images to correspond with the narrative. Although the relation of rapid eye movement and image creation is a sound theory, the theories behind the mental process that creates the narrative are still unresolved.

Only years ago, a theory proposed by the Sleep Research Center claimed that there are two cycles involving the incorporation of memories into dreams. In both cycles, certain impactful memories that occur throughout the day are distributed into a dream in the attempt of solving problems that were ignored while awake. In many cases, this results in disillusionment when reflecting on events, often ending in a reverse of the feelings toward an event. In most cases, negative events are transformed into positive ones through dreaming. Due to this long mental process, old issues return to mind in a matter of weeks, creating a delayed cycle of dreaming known as the dream-lag effect. The second, less common cycle is known as the day-residue effect, in which memories formed immediately before dreaming are incorporated into the dream. Both cycles, although contradictory, suggest that the formation of dreams relies completely on old memories, containing no purpose or creativity.

Another theory proposed by Miranda Occhionero, a researcher at the department of psychology, suggests that in the early stages of sleep, the brain actually plans the dream and creates a rough draft of what will embody the “remembered dream” once the dreamer awakes. The dream was already proven to be initiated by increased activity in the sections of the brain associated with memory, but this suggests that specific memories are chosen and organized in a sort of narrative before being displayed to the dreamer. Added onto this theory was the belief that the process of utilizing long-term memories in a dream works on four separate levels: procedural system, perceptual representation system, semantic system, and episodic system, which could work together or completely independently. The largest source of error

occurs between the procedural system, which devises the plan and creates the narrative, and the perceptual representation system, which turns the narrative into a visual story. These two systems are occasionally contradictory or simply random because the two systems don't necessarily cooperate. Because of this sense of randomness in the workings of memory, it is understandable that dreams are often random in their final product. Memories, once chosen, work on different levels and often present distorted versions of history that could conflict with one another. It can then be concluded from Occhionero's studies that dreams are not, in their essence, random, but suffer an illusion of chaos due to faults in the elaborate mental process.

One of the biggest questions I have when considering dreaming is why the dreamer has such little control as the dream occurs. My belief was that the dreamer takes part in the dream as it occurs, as if they were completely mentally invested in a vivid fantasy. This belief would mean that the dreamer has the ability to make decisions as the dream goes on, but that doesn't seem to be the case. For example, I didn't ponder running from the island or turning around to see them again. These choices simply make themselves, which would validate the theory proposed by Occhionero and other psychologists, in which a narrative is formed before the remembered dream begins.

Another solution to as to why the dreamer cannot usually ponder decisions or realistically judge the situation while dreaming is that the part of the brain responsible for judgment, known as "reflective consciousness," is inefficient. "Primary consciousness" is the only mode of thinking that is used in dreams, so people almost never realize the random nature of a dream until they wake up and their sense of reflective consciousness is restored.

Dreaming is not reserved for the REM stage, but the efficient quality of the brain at this time opposed to NREM results in a more vivid, memorable dream. In studies, it was proven that the limbic and paralimbic sections of the brain are utilized during REM, and can be directly attributed to the accretion of old memories cohesively into a narrative structure

before dreaming. Also, since the brain is functioning at the same level as wakefulness, with an unchanged metabolic rate to prove it, it will form a more logical story and then form a moral connection to the story. Because of this crucial step, the dream becomes a valuable memory for the brain, and remains in the dwellings of the limbic and paralimbic areas to become available for reflective consciousness.

A new study found that REM sleep is also related to a metabolism of glucose that is just as strong as wakefulness. Only during NREM does the metabolism drop, which is necessary for the long amount of time without eating. With a low metabolism, the functions of the brain are all slowed to accommodate. For that reason, the four levels of long term memory can become jumbled and convoluted. A common example is when the semantic system is successful but perceptual representation system is not. Someone from real life is integrated as a character into your dream and you seem to know who they are without seeing them. In reality, you wouldn't be able to see them if you tried. If you actively sought out this person and looked directly at them, your brain would panic and substitute any image instead of a face. With perceptual representation non-operational, the concept of a familiar person in your dream is not successfully transferred into an actual visual representation, so the face you remember will not be displayed on the person. Most likely, once you stared at this person in the dream, something that resembles a blank slate would have replaced his face, because your brain has simply lost that information for the time being. In NREM, it is very common to have a sense that something is occurring but not an actual representation. You could sense that someone else is taking part in your dream, similar to additional characters in a narrative, but no visual representation of them. This mental misstep would also validate the claim that a narrative is formed before the remembered dream begins, since information simply doesn't exist if sought. It would be as if the dream world outside the dreamers peripherals doesn't exist, and would only resemble empty space if actively sought.

To fully understand the accepted theories of dreams, one must delve into the theories of the essential psychologist, Sigmund Freud. Freud began considering intricate mental processes at a time when psychology, as a practice, was being ignored by the public. In Freud's time, mental patients were being mistreated, often to the point of death, and never given proper consideration. His many discoveries and accomplishments in the realm of psychoanalysis brought a new era to the world, in which the deficiencies of the mind were as respected as the deficiencies of the body. After this initial success in his curiosity, Freud then considered the even more abstract aspects of psychology. The inner workings of the subconscious mind were analyzed by Freud, specifically the process and symbolism of dreaming.

Freud, in his book *Interpretation of Dreams*, presents and then thoroughly interprets his own dreams. Freud chose to interpret his own dreams opposed to the boundless amount of dreams he has documented of his patients for several important reasons. For one, Freud disagreed with the old concept that dreams are to be interpreted by people who haven't dreamt it due to the fact that it would result in a biased approach if the dreamer were to interpret it. Instead, Freud believes that, by interpreting someone else's dream, the person applied his own outside beliefs to a dream that was created chiefly by and for someone else. Secondly, Freud's patients were all his patients because they had some disorder. To truly interpret dreams and consider them legitimate, the many mental disorders can not have an influence on them. As far as Freud was concerned, he was a mentally healthy human being, and therefore his dreams represented the dreams of all healthy people.

In Freud's first dream, the topic of an essentially failed patient was addressed. The woman still claimed to have symptoms after Freud supposedly cured her, so in his dream the woman returned, claiming physical symptoms, showing horrible swellings in her mouth and claiming abdominal pain. Also, an interesting fact to add, the woman had false teeth in the dream but had no problem with her teeth in real life.

When considering the addition of false teeth to the character, Freud recalls the time he met an old governess. The governess was very proper, residing in a wealthy estate and indulging in many luxuries. With age, though, came the inevitable rotting of teeth. Ashamed of this large flaw in her furiously treated body, she would often keep from speaking or opening her mouth at all when in public. Another aspect of the woman, mouth swelling and abdominal pain, were symptoms of Freud's wife when she was last sick. This combination proves the theory proposed by Occhionero because many fragments of memories are strewn together in a single narrative. In this single character, many different memories are piled together and represented as one.

Freud considers all dreams, once analyzed to their core, versions of wish-fulfillment. Several examples are made to prove his point, coming from acquaintances and his own experiences. A common example of wish-fulfillment dreams is when a hungry or thirsty dreamer dreams of eating or drinking to satisfy themselves. As Weygandt observes, the dream is counterproductive and only leads to disappointment, but Freud argues that such dreams are natural to all people, but only the sound sleepers achieve them. Another example is, when trying to fall back asleep, dreaming that one is already at their destination and need not wake up.

When considering the dreams of pure distress, Freud dissects one to prove that the underlying message is still wish-fulfillment. A distinction is made between the "manifest," or surface-level literal dream content, and the "latent" or unconscious "dream thoughts" as if dreams spoke in their own language that needed translating. In the case of severely distressing and chaotic dreams, a distinct aspiration or purpose can be dissected from the chaos once the "latent" concepts are removed from the "manifest" content that seems so trivial or chaotic. He compares these dueling processes to a journalist who is censored by the government and forced to express the same radical notions through clever allusions.

Freud's claim is argued by modern scientists, who claim that dreams are not aspirations,

but fragments of memories combined and illustrated into a narrative by the higher-level parts of the mind. Carl Jung, a fellow psychiatrist of Freud, claims that dreams are neither aspirations nor fragmented memories, but moral issues that were buried into the psyche during wakefulness. Jung also made the claim that humans respond to standard archetypes, such as the male hero and female counterpart, because of our brain's natural response to forming narratives. Additionally, by displaying buried moral dilemmas back to the conscious mind, it serves as a warning for the dreamer.

Jung has been dismissed by many psychology experts because his belief is the most far-fetched. Freud's theory was proposed at the same time as Jung and considered more realistic, since Jung's theory is simply too difficult to prove because the subconscious mind cannot be dissected and analyzed.

Two conflicting beliefs now present themselves. Freud claims that dreams contain a higher purpose, revealing pure aspirations hidden in the dreamer's subconscious. Jung and other esteemed modern psychologists have argued Freud's claim in multiple ways. Some psychologists, including author Susan Whitbourne, claim that dreams are distorted conglomerations of multiple fragments of memories collected randomly as the brain grows restless. Jung argues that dreams have a very deliberate motive in their narrative, expressing a moral dilemma back to the conscious mind. All three of these theories are valid and should be considered, but the only distinct method of realizing them

Now that I have accumulated enough information, I shall interpret the dream in the hopes of validating Freud's claims. Considering the manifest content that I remember, I recall swimming through an ocean with a powerful feeling of desperation. The latent thoughts behind this are simple, because at the time I had a severe fear of the ocean. Specifically, I was afraid

of the vast world that was so opposed to my own. I considered, and still consider, the ocean a world that should not be ventured into by a species that was designed solely for solid ground. Considering that belief, it is clear that I was actually afraid of the distance from civilization rather than the sea itself. I recall, when staring down into the ocean and seeing creatures lurking hundreds of feet below, only thinking how isolated I was from their world. It was as if I were floating on the top of the atmosphere, staring down at the miniscule dots of human beings as they functioned in life without any acknowledgement of my existence.

That is where the dream content starts to stray from the actual thoughts. At the time of this dream, I was still young enough to feel no connection with the world. I felt completely unimportant and useless, only consuming and never giving. Due to this distance, I also held the notion that, if I were to stop existing at that moment in time, I would be forgotten in a matter of years. In interpretation, I speculate that my isolation and confusion at the time was translated into this metaphor of a child floating on top of the ocean, seeing so much of a world but contributing to none of it.

In discovering the deep motives and reasoning underneath a supposedly random dream, I can confidently claim that dreams actually do have a deliberate purpose under their confusing surface. Of all the theories proposed in regards to the validity of dreams, it is clear that my dream proves the theory of Sigmund Freud. Wish fulfillment is clearly evident because my wish was to find some kind of contact with the world so distant from my own. By turning around from the ocean to see the island group one last time, I yearned to be part of a group in my last moments of life. The distinct motive behind this dream as well as Freud's dream of a suffering patient validate the belief that dreams deserve analysis and should be respected as vital processes of the subconscious mind.

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